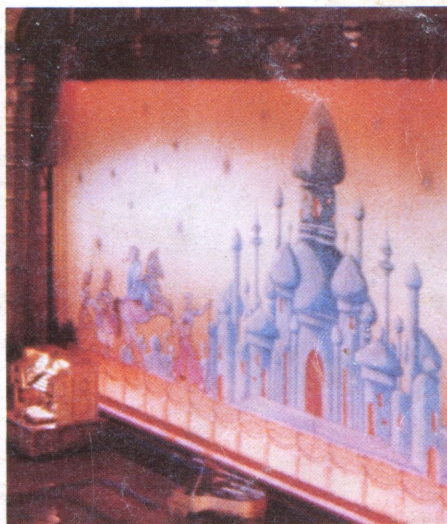
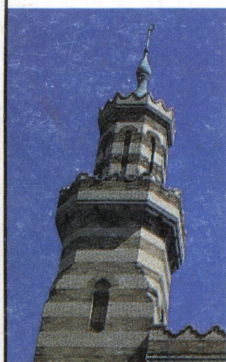


THE FABULOUS FOX AT 50





AN OPEN LETTER TO OUR FELLOW ATLANTANS

WQXI Radio is proud to have played a significant role in making possible the creation of THE FABULOUS FOX AT 50.

As a long-time citizen of this great city, WQXI Radio has contributed to its needs and interests, adding excitement and community involvement in its varied and fast-paced programming.

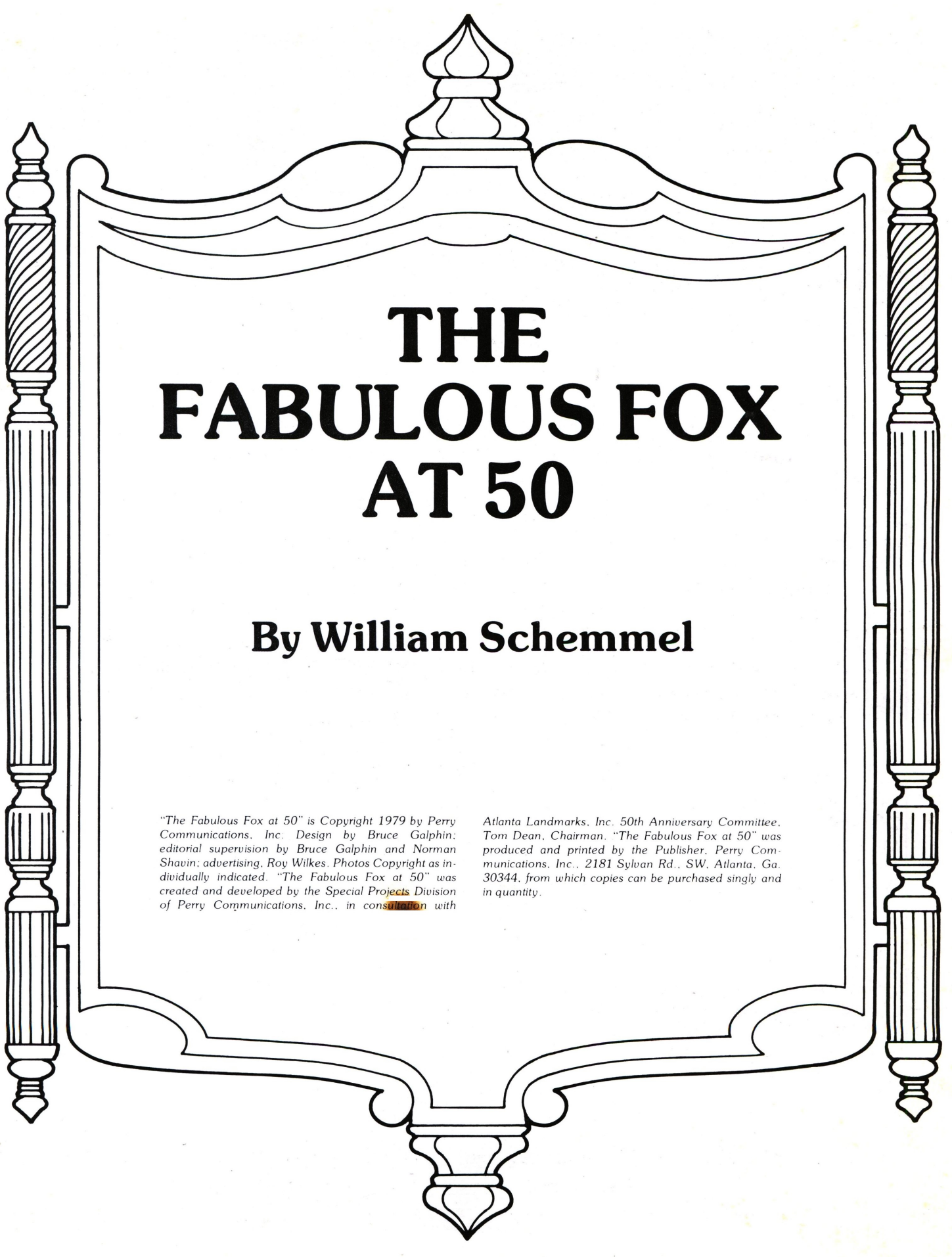
The Fox Theatre, an institution unique in America, has been a lustrous fixture in this community, a showcase for talent ever since it opened in 1929. Its extraordinary architecture echoes an exotic era, but its enormous stage has been the setting for attractions ranging from early-day "talkies" and the Metropolitan Opera to contemporary music and theatre.

The Fox and WQXI have served the community, and we are pleased to associate ourselves with an institution which, like our own progressive station, succeeds because of public interest, involvement and support.

Our best wishes *to* Number 1 *from* Number 1.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Jerry Blum".

Jerry Blum
Vice President-General Manager



THE FABULOUS FOX AT 50

By William Schemmel

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Atlanta Landmarks, Inc. 50th Anniversary Committee. Tom Dean, Chairman. "The Fabulous Fox at 50" was produced and printed by the Publisher, Perry Communications, Inc., 2181 Sylvan Rd., SW, Atlanta, Ga. 30344, from which copies can be purchased singly and in quantity.



THE FABULOUS FOX AT 50

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From fantasy to the reality of near extinction to a hopeful second half century.

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Inspired by Mideast ritual and Tut Fever, its fine detail passes time's test.

TECHNICAL DETAIL . . . 20

The Fox was advanced for its time and innovative in its illusions.

STAGE AND SCREEN . . 26

One of the Fox's great assets is its ease of handling movies, plays, concerts, opera.

SAVING THE FOX. 30

The grass-roots Atlanta Landmarks, Inc. raised mortgage funds and staved off the wrecker, but major restoration work remains.

With its Arabian nights curtain, gold organ and piano, Moorish arches, parapets and "sky," the Fox auditorium is the essence of fantasy.



Circa 1930 (early Will Rogers talkie dates it), the upstart Fox still had Victorian neighbors.

THE FOX: AN APPRECIATION



The Fox Theatre is such an exotically clad superstar that in any recounting of her story, she herself naturally steals the limelight. But the "Save the Fox" campaign is an important story, too—not just for its inherent heroine-tied-to-the-tracks drama, but for what it says about Atlanta and the region.

A few years ago, the cold economics of the Fox's dilemma would have sealed its doom. It was an aging building on a prime piece of real estate. Its operating overhead was high, and its repair needs mounting. Movies shown in a big house were an anachronism: First TV took its toll, then leases demanding long runs for prime films knocked the one-time queen from her Atlanta throne.

Fortunately for the Fox and for Atlanta, the era had passed when destroying such a landmark in the name of progress would be suffered quietly or simply ignored. Atlantans . . . Georgians . . . Americans everywhere are developing a reverence for their roots, respecting the contributions of each era.

And so Atlanta Landmarks, Inc. was established to promote survival of the Fox, an endangered species. Eventually, some financial heavyweights ensured success of the campaign, but the significant fact is that saving the Fox was a grass roots movement. Thousands of Atlantans and others contributed — from quarters to an anonymous and critical \$400,000.

And supporters gave an even more precious commodity: their time.

The roles of some were visible: Landmarks Chairman Beauchamp Carr, accountant Harold Stokes, attorney Joseph V. Myers. Joe Patten, now Technical Director of the Fox, rebuilt the magnificent Moller organ and became an expert on obscure facts about the Theatre. Thomas A. Dean, Chairman of the 50th Anniversary Committee, wrote the feasibility study which convinced the big givers and city officials. The huge list ends here only for lack of space.

Others' contributions are virtually unknown outside the Fox: Attorney Robert Foreman Jr., spending countless weekends and nights laboring from the auditorium's "parapets" to the hidden channels of its organ cables. . . . The literally hundreds of volunteers who sold books and tee shirts and bumper stickers. . . .

This very booklet was made possible by such a gesture of public spirit and enthusiasm for the Fox.

Tom Campbell first saw the Fox—and fell under her spell — in 1952 when he moved to Atlanta after attending the College of William and Mary. (He was no little influenced in the move by the lady he had met, wooed and won there, Emily Russell of the distinguished Georgia political family.)

Campbell describes himself as a small manufacturer, though his operations are growing faster even than his

family (there are six children). In 1960 he founded Camco Paints. Today, with a plant in Decatur and distribution centers in Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina, Camco has some 75 employees. It says something about Tom Campbell that 25 of his original employees are still with him.

Camco produces a full line of paints and is a leading supplier to states, municipalities and Federal agencies. The standard line is a good business in itself, but Campbell throughout his career has shown an innovator's restlessness and an artist's search for fine quality. Camco has become a leading supplier of paints to the craft and hobby market. Campbell developed an emulsion which brought one-step decoupage to thousands of hobbyists. The product's packaging was judged best in the National Hobby Show. (Camco's colorful letter-head won another prestigious award, a Cronite Cup first.)

In 1979, Camco introduced Promise paints, the product of more than five years' customer research and formula development. It is a latex which dries to a satin finish but can be washed like enamel—an effort to make life simpler for the do-it-yourselfer.

In the same spirit of making home decoration feasible for nonprofessionals, Campbell established Wallpaper Atlanta in 1977. Wallpaper that was pre-pasted, vinyl-coated for washability, and narrow enough for easy handling, he concluded, would simplify wallpapering in the same way latex had simplified painting.

His concept was a one-stop wallcovering store, with professional decorating advisers, beautiful decor and in-house inventories so huge that customers would have a choice of thousands of designs and colors. (There are some 2,000 patterns in stock.) The novel concept has been studied by professionals from all over the United States and abroad.

By 1980 there were five Wallpaper Atlanta stores, and Campbell has targeted five more by 1982.

In addition to Camco, radio station WQXI and its Vice President-General Manager Jerry Blum have played major roles in making this book possible through its promotion of both the book and the Fox. Neither could have a better-proven champion than the station which is credited with turning an obscure fraternity rafting party into the world's largest participation sporting event, the annual Chattahoochee Raft Race.

We are grateful, too, for the generous cooperation the writer had in researching the text, and the editors have had in securing photographs. Especial thanks are due *Southern Accents* magazine and the W.R.C. Smith Publishing Co. for lending color separations of the outstanding Jonathan Hillyer photographs originally published in *Southern Accents*.

— The Editors

The First 50 Years

A FANTASY BORN IN HARD TIMES SURVIVES A CLIFF-HANGER AND HAS A HAPPY ENDING



Chipp Jamison/copyright Perry Communications

Two Atlanta landmarks: Peachtree Street and the Fabulous Fox



If the Fox Theatre remains a wonder, a marvel, an architectural phenomenon in today's cosmopolitan Atlanta, im-

agine it 50 years ago, in a modest provincial center of 270,000: a new theater larger and more splendid than any American picture palace in America at that time.

Imagine, a half century ago, taking the rattling streetcar way uptown, where onion domes and minarets rose like desert mirages among Victorian boarding houses. Imagine buying tickets at the brass kiosk made in France, strolling up the block-long entrance corridor with its lighted goldfish pools and patterned tile, into the lushly carpeted lobby; thence into the orchestra section or the tented dress circle, to gaze out on a Middle Eastern courtyard canopied with azure skies, twinkling stars and magically drifting clouds.

After such an architectural show, the movie could only be an anticlimax. But the live performance nearly held its own against the competition—especially when the gigantic, 3,610-pipe Moller organ ascended regally from its pit to be excited to a medley of popular tunes

by a tiny musician, Iris Vinings Wilkins.

Enrico Leide, already a respected Atlanta conductor, led the Fox Grand Orchestra in music by Elgar. Then the screen lighted up to show "Steamboat Willie," Walt Disney's first Mickey Mouse cartoon. Back live on the stage, organist Wilkins' husband Don, Master of Ceremonies, led a community sing. Then came the Fanchon and Marco Sunkist Beauties, who were to become a staple of the Fox's early years. After Fox Movietone News came the feature film, *Salute*, starring George O'Brien, Helen Chandler and Stepin Fetchit. Apparently no print of this opus survives, and from all accounts, that is just as well.

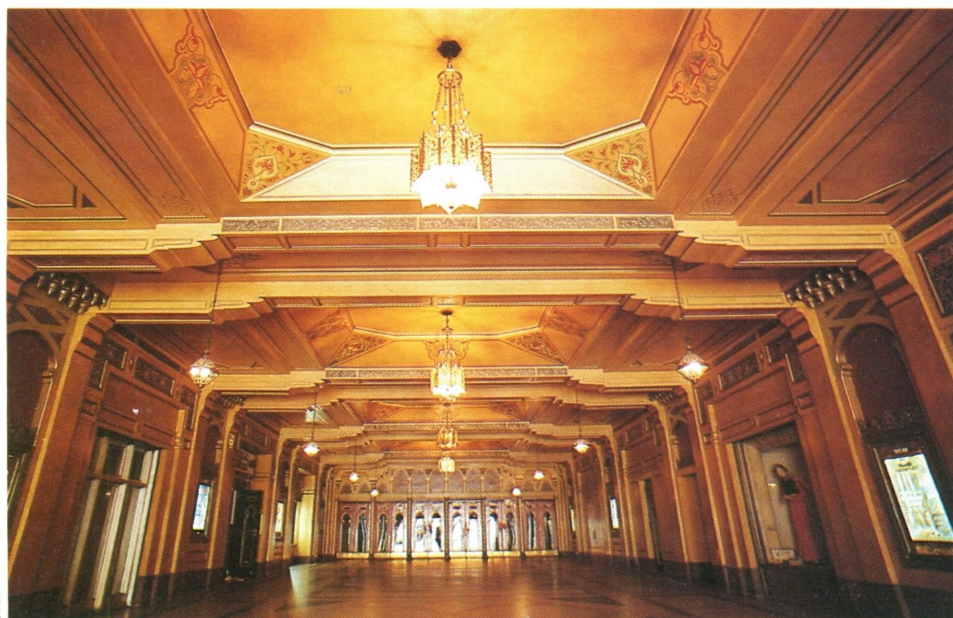
But all in all, it was quite a Christmas present for only 15 to 75 cents admission. And quite a consecration of the Fox Corporation's fifth and most lavish movie cathedral.

The city was overwhelmed by its new pleasure dome. Wrote a critic for *The Atlanta Journal*:

"This Fox Theater, in the simplest and least patriotic terms possible, is a bewildering spectacle of sheer opulent magnificence. Its architectural conception was at the outset unique, and the execution of the plan leaves no flaw in the idea somebody had of creating a place with a richness of color, a picturesqueness and almost disturbing grandeur beyond imagination."

The *Atlanta Constitution* reviewer got down to more basic terms, and lauded the Fanchon and Marco "Sunkist Beauties" as no less than, "two carloads of feminine pulchritude." The two dozen leggy ladies became a regular feature of the Fox's early years.

While praise for the mammoth new movie house poured in from



Suzanne Anderson

The now-familiar arcade was a last-minute addition.



The Egyptian Ballroom, once an Atlanta dancers' favorite, was originally the Shriners' banquet hall. Its renewed use for occasional dinners is a major asset in the Fox's current life.

around the country, a leading national architectural magazine lamented that such an incongruously exotic structure had been allowed to intrude on the peace and integrity of a quiet residential neighborhood.

As originally conceived, the Fox was neither Fox nor theater, but a headquarters for the Yaarab Temple of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (more commonly known as the Shriners). Heavily grounded in Middle Eastern ritual, the Shrine had been planning its new home since 1916.

By 1927, however, the dreams had ballooned so far out of touch with financial reality that the Shrine's directors were forced into a "marriage of convenience" with movie potentate William Fox. At Fox's suggestion, the temple was modified to include a movie auditorium seating nearly 5,000

patrons, and retail space on Peachtree Street and Ponce de Leon Avenue. No drastic changes in the original blueprints were necessary, since the Shriners had already planned a huge auditorium for their rituals and initiation ceremonies.

Under terms of the contract, the Fox Corporation would pay a total of about \$3 million in rental fees over a 21-year period. The Shriners would maintain their offices in the theater building, and be guaranteed use of the auditorium at least half a dozen times a year.

Although no accurate records of construction costs were kept, the most reliable estimates place the total around \$3 million. Architects today say that duplicating the building, with all its technical wonders and unique architectural features, probably would cost \$25-30 million.

At groundbreaking ceremonies, a Shrine spokesman remarked that though the theatre was intended for the enjoyment of his contemporaries, "Slight modifications at later periods will keep it continually abreast of swiftly changing times."

The speaker could not have imagined *how* swiftly and dramatically the times were to change. When the Fox's foundations were poured, America was dancing the Black Bottom, drinking prohibition liquor, and watching the Dow Jones' averages surge skyward like the thermometer on a July afternoon. By the time the doors were open to the public that Christmas Day, 1929, the party was over, and the country had a horrendous hangover it wouldn't overcome for more than a decade. Former millionaires now could barely scrape up the Fox's 60 cents admission (35 cents for matinees).

Keeping a luxury liner like the Fox afloat amidst economic typhoons proved impossible. The theater had a fulltime staff of over 50, and the cost of merely turning on the lights, not to mention operating intricate technical equipment, was astronomical. The rival Loew' Theatre Corporation answered a "May Day" call in August, 1930, and set up a joint management with Fox officials which lasted for two years.

By June, 1932, after only 125 weeks of talking pictures and Fan-chon and Marco stage extravaganzas, both the Fox Corporation and the Yaarab Temple Building Company declared bankruptcy. The bewildered Shriners held their last ritual in the Oriental splendor of the auditorium; the ceiling stars twinkled off, and the doors were temporarily locked.

They reopened two months later with all-sound motion picture programming and a promise to revive stage shows and organ concerts. Enrico Leide, who had conducted the original Fox Grand Orchestra for the theater's brilliant opening night, was appointed manager.

Leide quickly found that directing an orchestra was a whole lot simpler

than maintaining an imperiled movie palace. In December, 1932, the mortgage was foreclosed, and the theater auctioned for a humiliating \$75,000 to the Theatre Holding Company owned by officers of Yaarab Temple.

When Theatre Holding Company collapsed, the City of Atlanta took possession for non-payment of taxes. The doors stayed open, however, with movies interspersed with concerts by the struggling Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (not a direct ancestor of today's ASO), community concerts, and special programs arranged by the Atlanta Music Club.

The theater didn't find firm footing until 1935, when Mosque, Inc. (jointly owned by Paramount Pictures and Atlanta businessmen Arthur Lucas and William Jenkins) took ownership. Under Lucas and Jenkins' hard-headed business management, the theater slowly inched out of the red into the black for the first time in its life.

Although movies no longer were preceded by Japanese acrobats and dancing girls, occasional concerts brought to the vast Fox stage such cultural superstars as Rosa Ponselle, Grace Moore, Leopold Stokowski

and the Philadelphia Orchestra, Yehudi Menuhin and pop idols like Nelson Eddy. Atlantans danced away their Depression blues to live orchestras in the Egyptian Ballroom. In 1939, the Shriners gave up their last foothold, leasing their executive offices to the theater management.

Through the '40s, the Fox reigned supreme, and on a Saturday night a slicked-down swain took his lovely to the Paramount, Loew's, Roxy or Rialto only if the Fox were sold out, or she'd seen the Fox feature film the previous weekend with another beau. Why, the Fox was so up-to-date it even provided parking.

In January 1951, Atlanta theater operators Robert B. Wilby and Herbert F. Kincey, who'd made a frustrated ownership bid in 1933, took control under an organization known as Wilby-Kincey Service Organization. While the new phenomenon of television, drive-in movies and suburban flight were ringing down the curtain on many a downtown movie house, an iron-fisted, white-gloved manager kept the Fox's regal head high. He was Noble K. Arnold.

A native of the South Georgia hamlet of Parrot, Arnold had a quarter century's experience in movie management when he graduated to the Fox in 1951. Promptly, he ordered enough repair work at least to rescue the Mighty Moller from the grime of its pit and restore some of its full-throated glory; he initiated the tradition of the Fox Theater's "Quote for the Day"; he had a knack of managing people, from the most junior-ranking usher to the Hollywood stars who made occasional appearances on his stage.

A feud with comedian Jerry Lewis became legendary in the entertainment industry. Lewis, so the story goes, demanded a platform be built for a certain dance number; Arnold refused; Lewis said, Well then, this'll be my last performance in your theater;



Shriners' dreams led to building the Fox, but hard times limited their use of its space. This skylit salon originally was their lounge.

Arnold said that was just fine with him, and Lewis never returned.

Under Arnold's regime, all employment applicants were rigorously screened. Every day, before they went on duty, ushers were lined up military style for inspection. Arnold checked their uniforms, their shoeshines, their fingernails, their hair, even their breath, lest some patron be offended.

The usher corps wore blue uniforms in summer, red in winter, always with white batwing standup collars and bow ties. Being an usher at the "Fabulous Fox" was more an honor than it was a job. Arnold made daily inspections of the premises, too, rubbing his white gloves over the furniture and seeing that even the boiler rooms were swabbed down as scrupulously as on a U.S. Navy warship.

The Metropolitan Opera landed at the Fox in 1947, and with Noble Arnold's passion for style and efficiency, the marriage between the great stars and the great house became a legend. For two decades Zinka Milanov, Renata Tebaldi, Franco Corelli, Anna Moffo, Birgit Nilsson, Leontyne Price, James McCracken and other immortals sent their voices into the far reaches of the Fox balconies.

Opera week was the zenith of Atlanta's social calendar. Tickets weren't purchased; they were handed down like precious heirlooms. Since the Fox had no wine-pouring license, the glittering crowds streamed across Peachtree Street at intermission and sipped champagne in the lobby of the Georgian Terrace. The stars were hosted at post-performance dinners that often went on until dawn.

Although they loved the acoustical perfection and rich ambience of the Fox, the Met stars frequently became confused by the vast understage areas. To help them find their way, names of New York City streets, oriented to the Metropolitan Opera House, were chalked on the walls. "W. 39th," "W. 40th" and



Patriotic fervor of early World War II days is reflected in this display. It was a prosperous time for the Fox as a movie house.

others still can be seen today.

Opening night, 1948, was especially memorable for the snafu caused by a "pair of bushy eyebrows." Strikes instigated by John L. Lewis prevented the Met company train from arriving until an hour and a half before curtain time. Even when the troupe reached the Fox, their costumes were still somewhere between Atlanta and Washington. In the best show-biz tradition, the show—*Carmen*—went on, albeit three hours late, in street clothes.

It was a sad day for opera, Atlanta and the Fox when the new Atlanta Civic Center, with its inferior acoustics but 600 additional seats, captured the Met in 1967. Management remains optimistic that the beloved prodigal will return one day.

Through the '50s and early '60s, big movies continued to splash across the enormous Fox screen. Audiences packed the house for such blockbusters as *The Robe*, *Gypsy*, *Giant*, *Auntie Mame* and *Guns of Navarone*. Ironically, the Fox, born at the end of the silent movie era, didn't play its first silent until a special performance of *The*

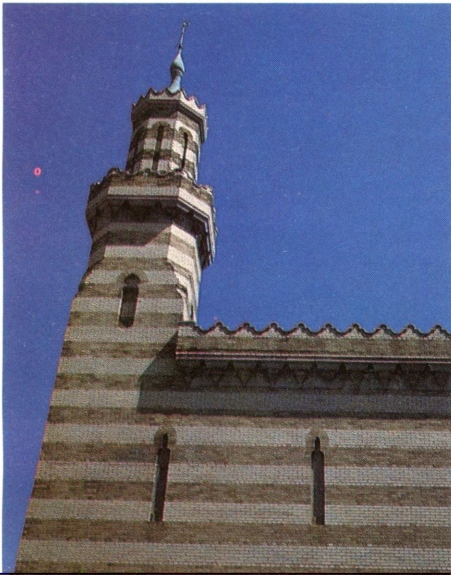
Eagle in 1969.

Long before Noble Arnold's retirement in 1970—he died in Atlanta seven years later—the Fox's time as a movie palace had run out. Television, suburban flight and drive-ins contributed to its demise, but the official death knell was sounded by an industry policy that now required theaters to guarantee a certain "run," often of two months or more, before a first-rate film could be obtained.

The Fox was simply too large. Its 3,933 seats—reduced by 529 during modernization in 1964—ruled out the long runs. Big box office films went to the suburban crackerboxes, and the Fox was reduced to low-budget productions. Even these failed to fill the house, and on Jan. 2, 1975, the Fox ended its career as a regular motion picture theater with the last showing of an unmemorable film, *The Klansman*, starring Richard Burton.

The great doors were padlocked, only to be opened again by the dedication and dollars of thousands of Atlantans and others who would not let her die. (See Chapter 5.) Life was beginning again for the Fox as it approached its 50th birthday. ¶

FOX'S ARABIAN NIGHTS LINES AND TUT FEVER DETAIL HAVE PASSED THE JUDGMENT OF TIME



Jonathan Hillier/copyright Southern Accents

Bands of brick. "minaret" tower accent the building's facade.

Like the movies on its screen, the Fox was a grand illusion. To some, it might have been a mere movie palace, admittedly of a monumental scope. But to true believers, it was a treasure cave, a refuge from reality, a secret hiding place. Under its arabesque arches, mortals became Ali Baba, Dorothy

in Oz, Tom and Huck adventuring through the Arabian Nights. The gold Moller organ had only to ascend from its vault, the stars wink in their make-believe heaven, and there was no Depression, no war, no woe or personal care.

In a sense, the medium genuinely was the message, for only a film of spectacular proportions—a *Giant*, a *Robe*, a *Guns of Navarone*—could rival the arena itself for the audience's attention. Adrift in the dimly lighted auditorium-courtyard, it was all but impossible to resist the magnetic urge of fantasy. What fabled sheiks dwelt behind those fortified turrets, those castellated walls? What lay beyond the clouds drifting lazily across the azure sky? Even a routine visit to the restroom triggered a vicarious time-trip to the Land of the Pharaohs. Ensnared in one of the mahogany polychrome throne chairs, you were Queen Nefertiti, or King Tut himself.

The boy pharaoh, Tutankhamen, wielded a mystical influence over the architecture of the Fox. Discovery of his treasure-laden tomb by the English archeologist Howard Carter in 1922 sent America into a frenzy of Egyptomania. The craze was still running strong in the late '20s, when the Yaarab Temple of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine—more commonly known as the Shriners—set out to build a lavish temple headquarters on Atlanta's Peachtree Street.

Tut fever was a stroke of good fortune for the Shriners, a Masonic organization whose ritual had been drawn from Egyptian and Arabian cultures long before the pharaoh and his fabulous treasures were heralded on these shores.

The craze for everything Egyptian

only enhanced the Shriners' desire for a temple of Oriental grandeur. The task of transforming their dream into brick-and-mortar reality fell to the architectural firm of Marye, Alger and Vinour, which was simply instructed to design a structure that would last forever and be more magnificent than the legendary Baghdad of the caliphs.

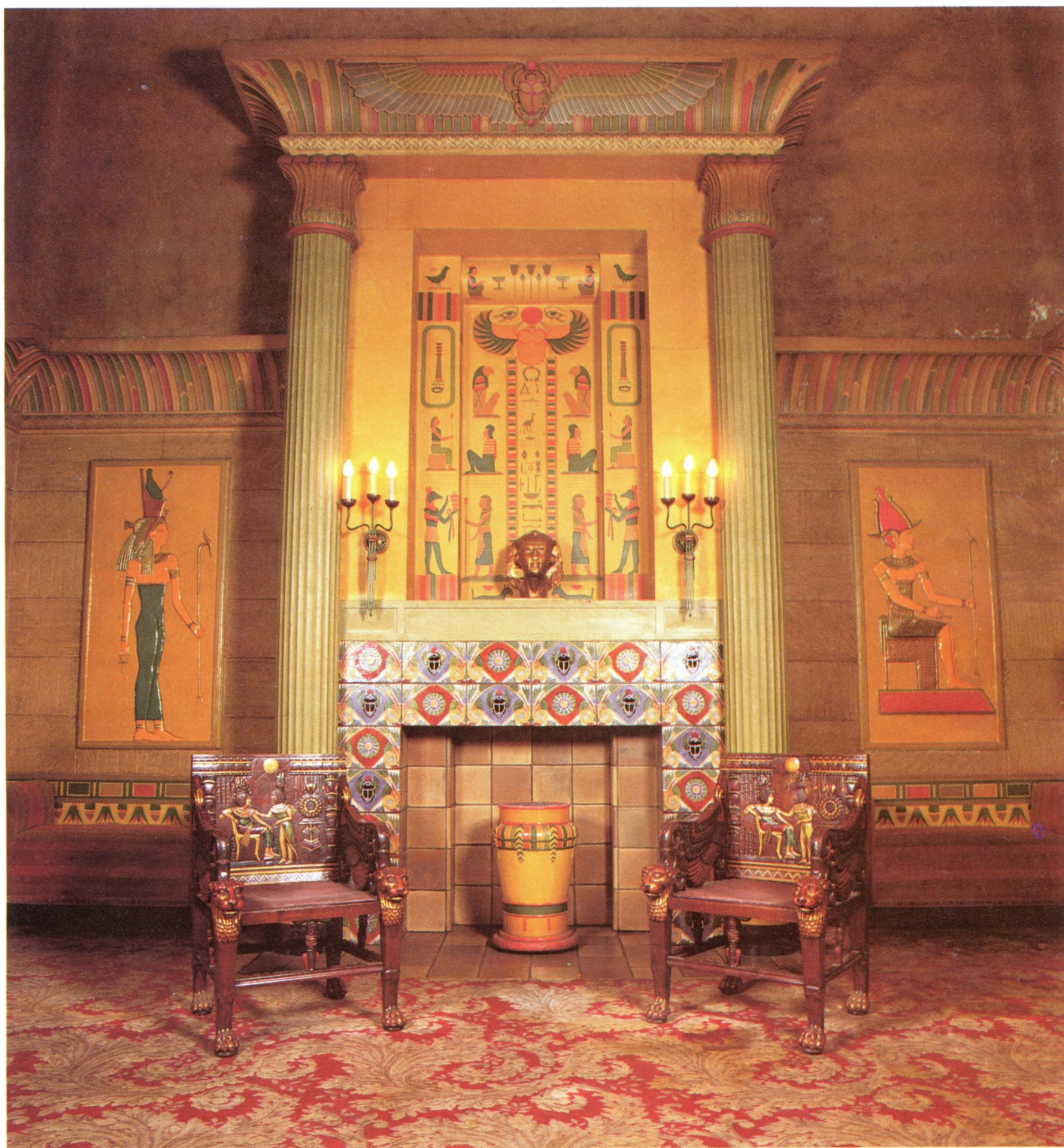
Principal designer Oliver J. Vinour was a native Frenchman, schooled in architecture at the esteemed Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. For his inspiration, he turned to three principal sources: picture books on Nubia and the Holy Land, and a stack of 50 picture postcards a friend had brought from a grand tour of the Middle East.

Although Vinour and his associates contended that their design for the Fox was of "pure Mohammedan style," they skillfully worked into the interior and exterior motifs architectural elements of Egypt, Morocco, Nubia, Jerusalem and Arabia. Even with all this, however, the Fox was given a subtlety of style, a sense of tastefulness lacking in other movie palaces of the period. A building rich with ornamental detail, it never appeared overstated.

Because it was originally designed for an Arabic-grounded order, the Fox had some valid premise, which an Elizabethan-style theater in Newark, N.J., or an Italian rococo design in downtown Detroit couldn't claim. It was extraordinarily large because it was originally intended to house a Shrine Temple with 5,000 members.

Viewed from the outside, the illusion was more that of a cluster of buildings in Old Cairo than a single structure occupying much of a block in Atlanta, Georgia. The exterior teased onlookers with promises of the fantasies that lay within.

One of the most opulently detailed areas in the theater is the ladies' lounge on the mezzanine, pictured below: "hieroglyphics," bas reliefs of royal figures, scarab decorations, etc. Closer looks at the throne chairs are on p. 14.





Moorish architecture in the heart of the American Southeast may be a visual jolt, but this early view of the Ponce de Leon facade shows the integrity and harmony of the design. Architects Marye, Alger and Vinour were more accustomed to traditional structures like telephone exchanges and churches.

Horizontal ribbons of cream and buff brick were broken by arches—four-centered arches, lancet arches, ogee arches, horseshoe arches—that wrapped about the building and blended harmoniously with square and circular geometric brick designs, and tile and tabby ornamentation. Minarets, styled after the prayer towers of Islamic mosques, capped each corner of the building.

Fire escapes, an unobtrusive part of the design, were broken by small balconies leading into various sections of the theater. On the Ponce de Leon Avenue side, the fire escapes also served as the only access to the black section in the upper reaches of the theater's stratosphere. In those rigidly segregated

days, black patrons not only had to view the screen from afar; they were denied the excitement of most of the theater's ornamental and technical wonders.

This side of the Fox was capped with three squat onion domes. The largest, of leaded copper, was ribbed with fanciful latticework and crowned with the Islamic crescent. A set of doors beneath the domes, at street level, was originally intended as the main entrance.

However, when movie mogul William Fox contracted with the Shriners, he decreed that theater patrons enter through a grand terrace arcade on Peachtree Street. Above it, Fox erected his huge electric marquee, flanked by a pair of

minarets. To help the theater pay its way, Fox also altered the design to provide retail space along Peachtree and Ponce de Leon. Renovation of this space recently was made possible through a \$200,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The 140-foot arcade, or loggia, was like a magical Arabian carpet, transporting patrons out of the mundane into a land of dreams. Covered to protect patrons from the elements, it was embellished with filigreed lamps and blue and red tiles.

Awaiting admittance, moviegoers could window-shop, and scan posters heralding upcoming films or live productions like the Fanchon

and Marco "Sunkist Beauties." They applauded patrons who, emerging from the latest Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers musical, often tap-danced down the terrazzo to the street. The Fox had that kind of exhilarating effect on Depression- and war-weary Atlantans.

Opening off the arcade was the main entrance to the Shriners Banquet Hall, later known as the Egyptian Ballroom. Once Atlanta's largest dance palace, the ballroom was another quick remedy for the blues.

The theater's lushly carpeted main lobby titillated the imagination still further for the surprises that lay ahead. Two grand staircases swept up to the loges and dress circles; another led down to the orchestra-level lounges. While waiting for a friend, patrons could rest on velvet-covered benches and watch the goldfish in the blue-tiled pools.

Fortunate those who entered the auditorium the first time.

The huge room (some 64,000 sq. ft. of floor space) came on them by degrees. The full impact registered only when they emerged from beneath the balcony overhang and found themselves in an Arabian courtyard, over which rode a sky full of clouds and blinking stars. In the early years, they could also have witnessed a mysterious sunrise-sunset across the "courtyard." Engineers are currently restoring this long-lost technical marvel.

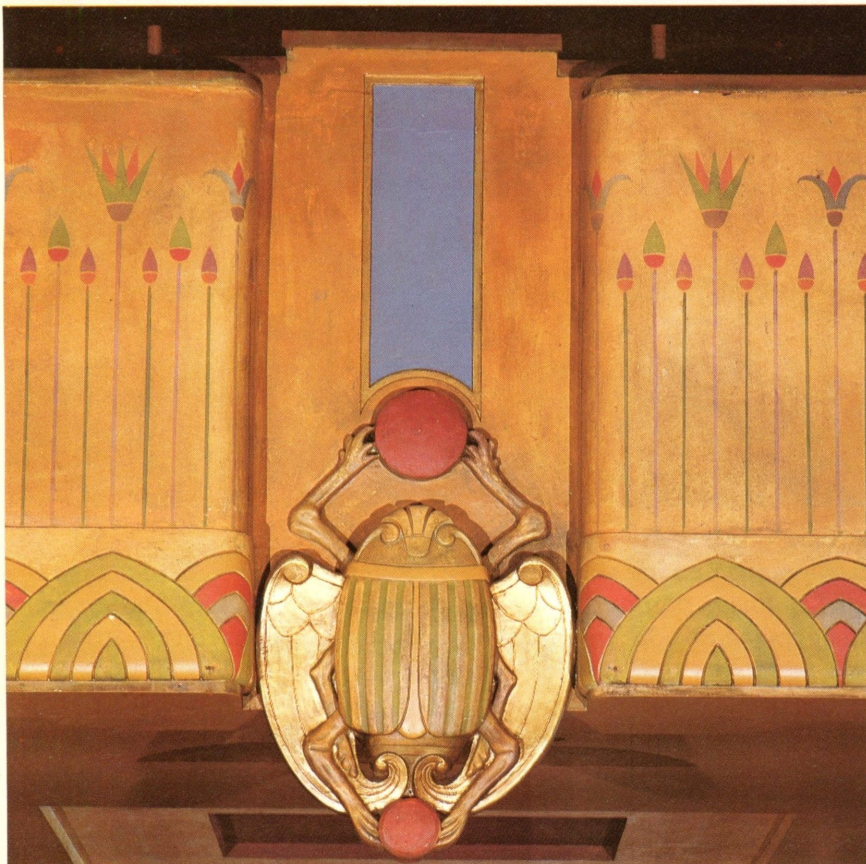
The courtyard effect is created by an illusionary open sky and by castellated walls with parapets, barred windows and turrets running from the edges of the stage to the upper balconies. The stage area itself spans 140 feet from wall to wall. Above it soars a 79-foot proscenium arch lighted by antique-style lanterns, casting a mellow orange glow. The most beautiful of the original stage curtains depicts mosques and Moorish riders in hand-sewn sequins and rhinestones.

False balconies at either side of the stage frame ornate trefoil grilles,



The courtyard effect of the main auditorium is repeated on smaller scale on the mezzanine promenade (top photo: Arches at left offer view of two-story courtyard.) In lower photo of staircase leading to main lobby, the original carpeting bears the Fox "F" design along with stars and crescents.

Rich detailing is all the more impressive in this era of pre-cast concrete and glass walls. A sampling here: caryatid-style row ends, a scarab (ancient Egyptian symbol of the sun god) and deep-carved back and arms of chairs seen on p. 11. The two royal figures represent King Tut and his bride. Discovery of Tut's tomb only a few years before the Fox was built had fascinated Americans.





Falcon wings (with intertwining snakes, left) also represent the Egyptian sun god. The motif is repeated several times in the Fox: on ceilings, doorways, furniture. The free-standing ticket kiosk, below, was made of brass in France.



which served to screen pipes of the Moller organ.

This flair for visual trickery (illusion, if you will) is a Fox hallmark. Virtually every practical detail was cunningly disguised. Heating ducts were covered with ornate grillework; the "sky" is a blue-painted ceiling, upon which are projected electric lights to simulate distant stars. A huge striped canopy draped above the uppermost balcony is made of plaster with steel underpinings. It acts as a funnel, drawing the sounds from the stage to the farthest reaches of the house.

What appear to be wooden beams in many areas of theater are plasterwork. Swedish craftsmen brought from Ohio simulated the "beams", granite blocks and gold filagree by mixing corn flakes, formaldehyde, cornstarch and other substances with the plaster. This material not only acted as fireproofing, but greatly enhanced the acoustical perfection of the building.

For an immense building — the

auditorium measures more than 64,000 sq. ft., and originally seated nearly 5,000 patrons — the Fox is surprisingly intimate. Patrons in the first row of the loge are only 19 feet from the apron of the stage. At full capacity, the balcony was designed to "give" about three inches.

The theater is a fascinating maze of lounges, offices, meeting rooms, retiring rooms, and technical areas. The public has normal access to less than half the building's enormous space.

The public areas were largely decorated by William Fox's wife, Eve, who used ideas she'd seen on her travels through the Middle East. She provided various sections with their own distinctive motifs, all of which blended harmoniously into the whole.

The Gentlemen's Lounge below the main lobby is splashed with scenes of noble Egyptians and their steeds. Floors are bordered with colored tiles, and furnished with tables and chairs accented with winged scarabs, ancient Egyptian symbols of the sun god. A highly stylized falcon, another representation of the sun god, also appears here and elsewhere. Brass doorknobs are fashioned like pharaohs' faces, light fixtures like chariots.

Throne-like chairs in the Ladies' Lounge are made of mahogany with polychrome texturing, and bear images of King Tut and his bride. The boy-king shows up as a decorative feature in other rooms as well. Further accentuating the decor are faces of snarling lions, regal images of the goddess Isis, the god Horis, and the Pharaoh Ramses II. The ancient Egyptian calendar is painted on the Egyptian Ballroom's ceiling. Floor lamps, urns, sofas, chairs and tables all have an Egyptian or Arabic influences.

Gilt doorways sometimes lead into rooms; more often, they disguise a broom closet, a utility room, a telephone booth, or a blank wall.

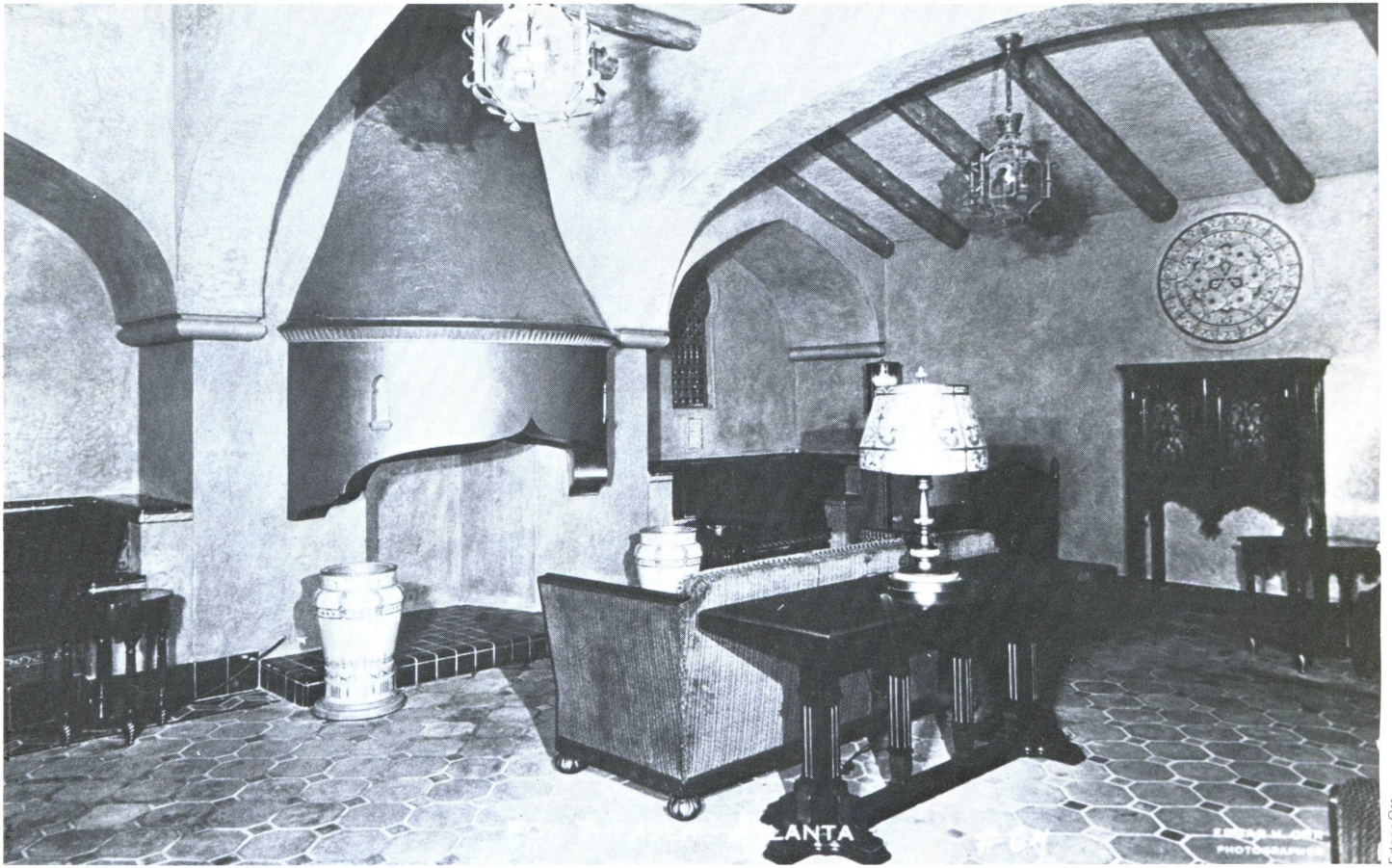
During its turbulent 50-year lifetime, many of the Fox's prized decorative features have been broken, frayed, and discolored with grime. An army of dedicated volunteers have been toiling for the past five years to restore these priceless relics to their original beauty.

The theater will take a giant's step backward to the magnificence of that opening night in 1929 when carpeting and auditorium seat upholstery are replaced, at an estimated cost of some \$300,000.

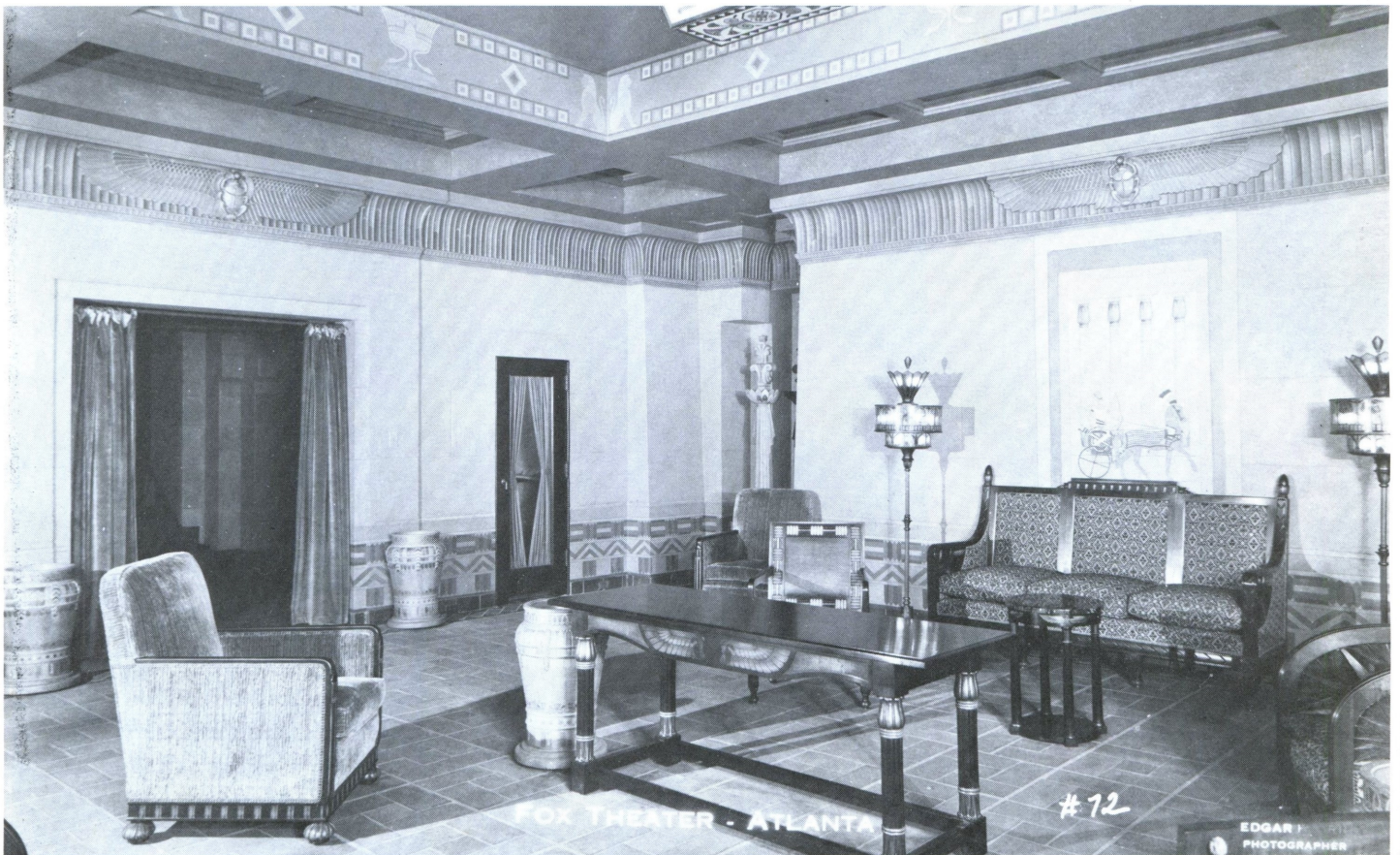
Nobody ever claimed that face-lifting a living legend was cheap. **F**

Below: The corner of Peachtree and Ponce de Leon during construction in 1929. Recent work restored the retail area to this earlier simplicity.





Edgar Orr



Edgar Orr/Kile Studio

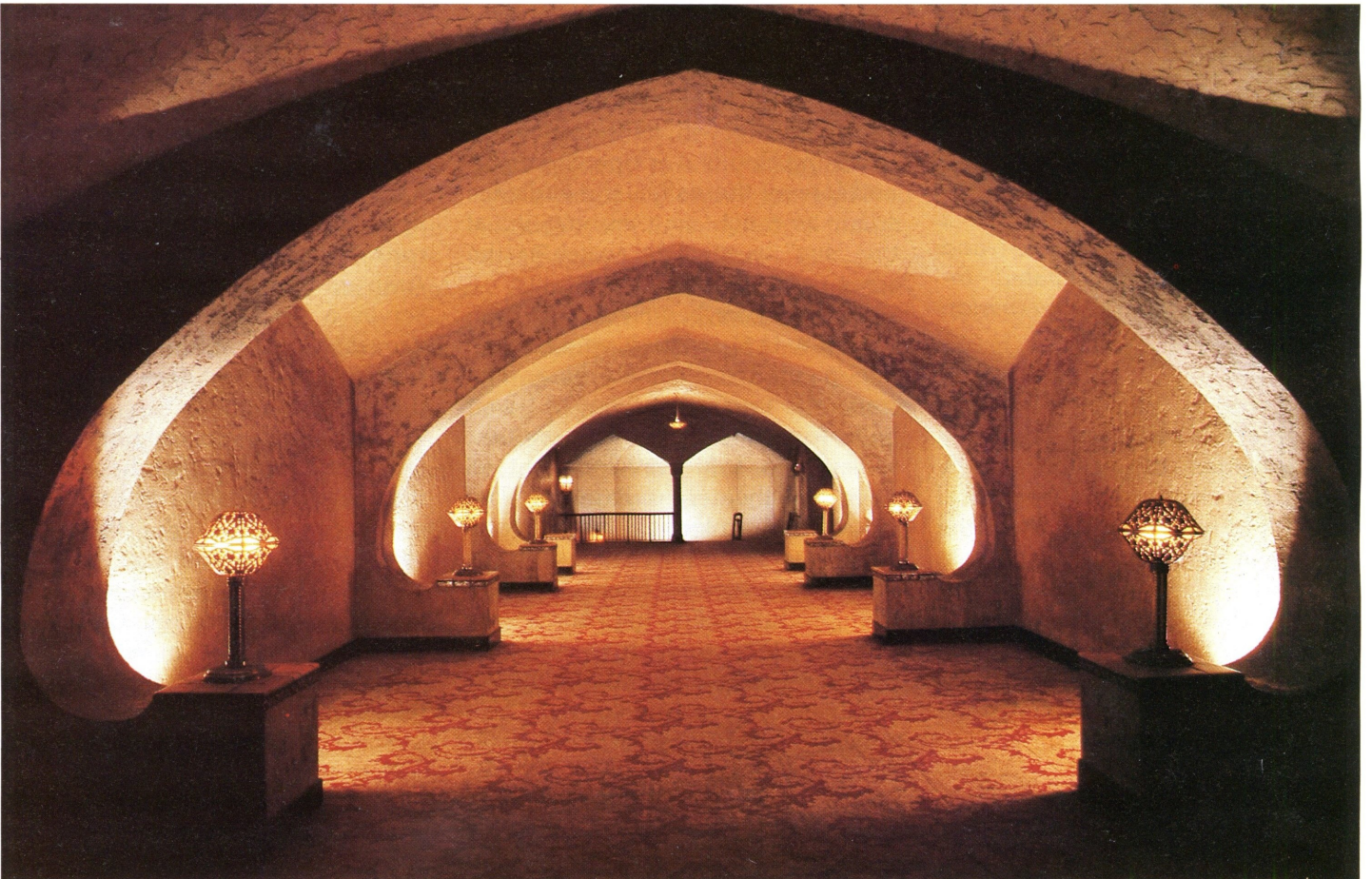
Men's lounges (mezzanine above, lower level below) are ornate, but don't rival the ladies'.

William Fox didn't depend on his movies to dazzle audiences. The theater itself was a show. At right: Lamp accents staircase leading from main lobby; below: mirrored luxury of powder room on mezzanine.



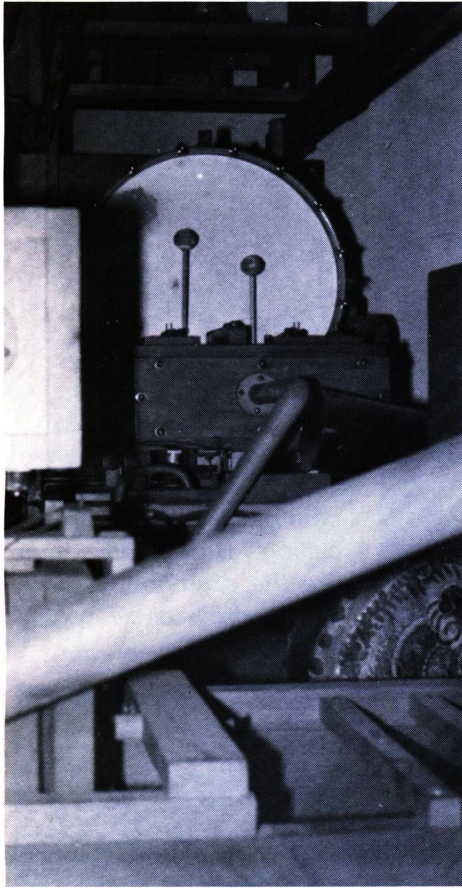


Arches contribute powerfully to the exotic looks of the Fox. At left, they share billing with the chandelier and painted ceiling. But below, they are the dominant feature of the dress circle promenade.



More Than a Pretty Face

FINE ENGINEERING AND MASTERFUL ILLUSION GET LOW BILLING BUT HIGH TECHNICAL MARKS



Robert Foreman Jr.

In addition to pipes, the Fox's Moller organ makes music—and noise—with vacuum-activated instruments, such as the percussion section above.



The Fox, like any bona fide woman of mystery, coyly disguised her technical secrets. Patrons wondered how the stars could twinkle so believably in the make-believe heavens. . .they were amazed as the Moller organ and Enrico Leide and the Fox Grand Orchestra ascended from the

nether world beneath the stage . . . in the distant reaches of the upper levels, they marveled at the acoustical perfection of every word and musical note. . .they were delighted at the cool waves of air shielding them against the debilitating heat of an Atlanta summer afternoon.

They ached to know the answers, but a gentleman never asks a lady too many personal questions.

On her 50th anniversary, patrons young and old still were wondering, and still amazed and delighted at the technical secrets and theatrical sleight-of-hand that have kept the Fox as young as on her opening night, Christmas, 1929. The theater was so far ahead of its time that features considered revolutionary a half century ago are still unique.

Probably no other technical effect has intrigued Fox patrons over the past five decades as much as the courtyard sky, with its stars and lazily drifting clouds. On opening night, and forever thereafter, the audience spent as much time craning up at the "sky" as they did watching the screen and stage.

The sky that beguiled them then and now is in reality a vaulted ceiling, painted a clear-sky blue. The stars are created by tiny 11-watt bulbs fixed above four-inch crystals, radiating a soft twinkling light all over the theater auditorium. The clouds are projected by a circular disc, augmented by slides, spots and special lighting effects that can also produce rain, fog, snow and other weather conditions.

When the Fox first opened to the public, its bag of lighting tricks also included a phenomenal solar show. The "sun" arose with a faint pinkish-blue glow in the top left rear level, reached a brilliant high noon zenith halfway across the auditorium, and

set 15 minutes later behind the right front stage area. Only a few older patrons remember this dazzling show; an overloaded circuit sent it into eclipse in the early 1930s.

The spectacular 15-minute "sunrise-sunset" effect broke down in the Fox's first year, victim of an electrical overload. Its restoration was part of the 50th anniversary celebration program.

However, a team of volunteer electricians worked under the direction of technical director Joe Patten to have the old Fox sun shining again for the 50th anniversary celebration.

Beyond the sky, draped above the uppermost levels and projection booths, hangs what appears to the unschooled eye to be a Bedouin chieftain's striped tent. The chieftain would have had a backbending chore lugging this particular tent around the desert, for it's not canvas at all, but plaster fortified with steel rods. While it adds to the theater's Arabian Nights motif, the canopy serves a practical purpose. It's an acoustical foil, capturing the sounds from the stage and drawing them to the rear of the house.

The canopy was only one of the technical features that have made the Fox a model of acoustical engineering. Over the years, architects of any number of well-known concert halls and theaters—including the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.—have studied the Fox and taken many of its hints. Construction materials themselves play a vital part in the Fox's acoustical reputation. Instead of heavy draperies, which would have muffled much of the sound, the designers made ex-

tensive use of plaster, worked usually to a smooth finish. Such surfaces actively reflect the sound from the stage, the Moller organ, the orchestra pit, or the electronic audio system.

Some of the world's greatest artists—rock stars, pianists, dramatic actors, orchestra leaders, organists and the world's greatest operatic singers—have heaped praise on the theater's incomparable acoustical clarity. If the decision had been left to the singers, the Metropolitan Opera Company would still be playing the Fox on its annual visit to Atlanta in early May.

The acoustics, combined with the auditorium's rich ornamental splendor, made the Fox *the* highlight of the Met's spring tour. (As more than one star has commented, you haven't seen *Aida* until you've seen it at the Fox.) But the vast stage area also dazzled, and sometimes confused, Met singers who'd sung on famous stages all over the world.

Spanning some 140 feet from wall to wall, the Fox stage remains one of the widest ever built; the proscenium opening, crowned by an ornamental arch, is nearly 80 feet across. In all but the grandest of grand operas, where huge crowds of extras and elaborate scenery and props were required, sides of the stage had to be blocked off to prevent the production from becoming lost.

Stage depth is some 37 feet, with a 74-foot metal gridloft from which 57 scenery battens may hang. Under the direction of Joe Patten, extensive modernization was carried out in 1979 to accommodate long-running Broadway musicals like "A Chorus Line" and "The Wiz," and the Atlanta Ballet Company's annual Christmastime presentation of "The Nutcracker."

Instead of the trap doors found in most theaters of its period, the Fox stage utilizes six motorized elevator lifts. Two of these are commodious enough (40 feet wide, six feet deep) to transport entire choruses from the lower levels to stage; a third lowers

movie loudspeaker horns below stage when not in use.

Two additional elevators accommodate portions of the orchestra pit, with a sixth which raises the Mighty Moller from its vault.

A 35-foot-wide lighting switchboard controls more than 450 circuits and 530 kilowatts of power available for stage and auditorium lighting. Other features unique to the Fox stage area include a special set of footlights at the rear area of the stage to illuminate the backdrop; a 45-degree-angle lighting position from the auditorium; several especially designed stage curtains; monitor paging system to all dressing rooms; an original in-house telephone switchboard, with more than 100 lines.

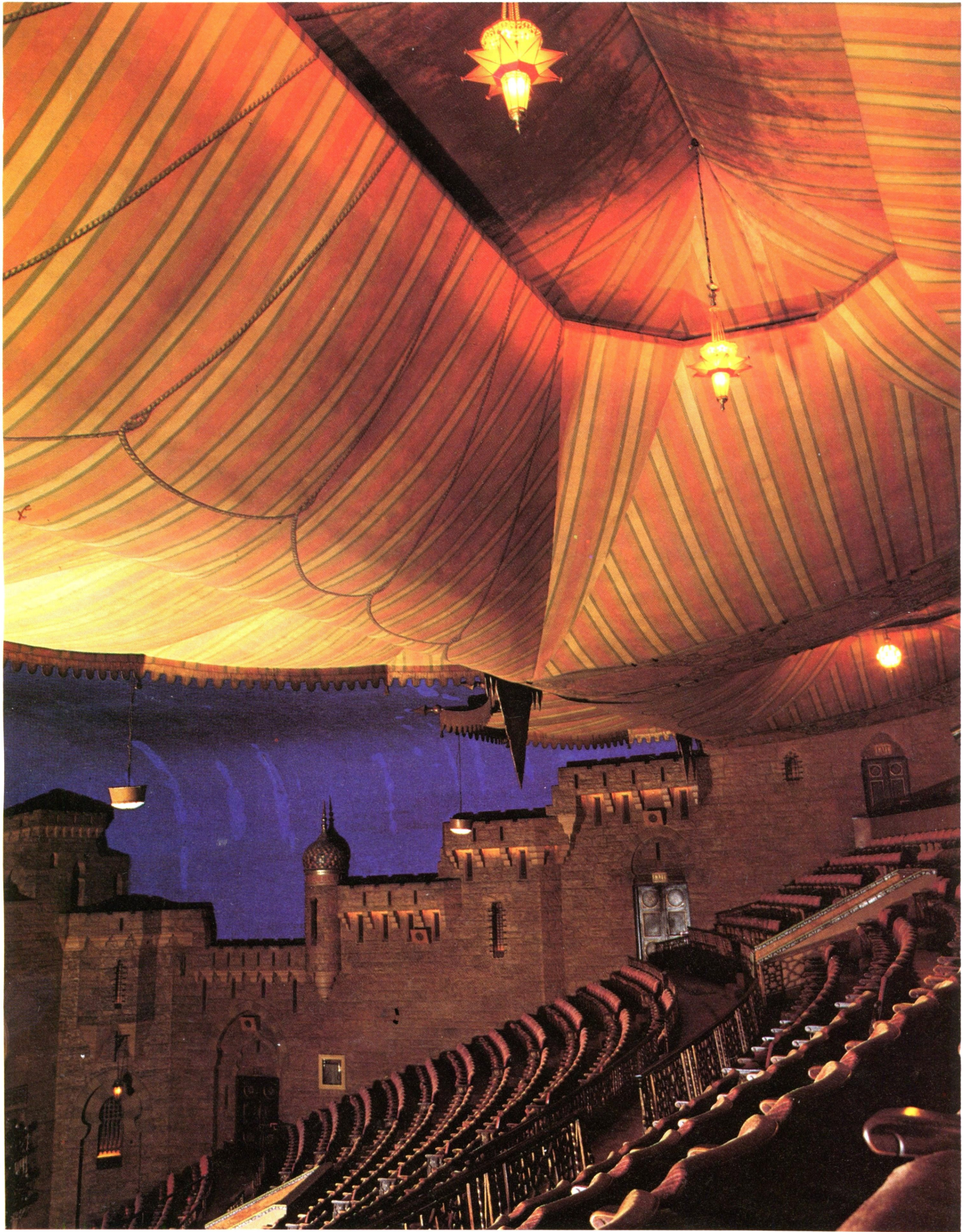
The Fox was one of the first movie houses in the Southeast to install a 35-mm projector and panoramic screen for the showing of such 1950s screen spectacles as *The Robe*, *Auntie Mame*, *Giant*, *Gypsy*, and *Guns of Navarone*. These classic motion pictures, which for a time packed the house and staved off the theater's rapidly approaching years of crisis, were augmented by a 26-loudspeaker stereophonic system. Many of the same motion pictures are featured in the theater's highly popular summer Family Film series.

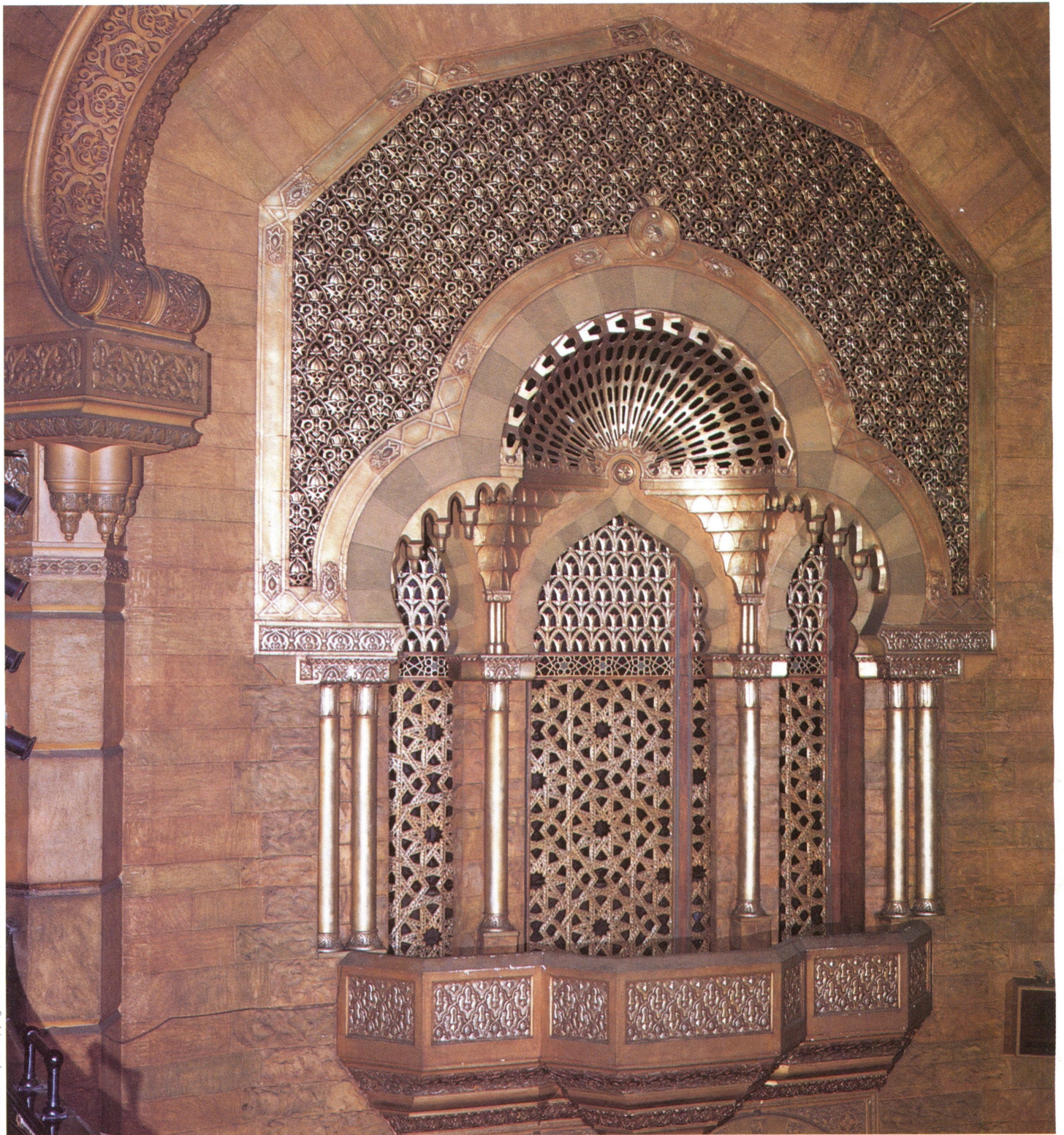
Although much of the stage, lighting and projection equipment had become outmoded or dysfunctional through misuse and lack of use, Joe Patten and volunteer technicians have restored virtually everything to first-rate condition.

Patten's special love is the Moller organ. "Mighty Mo" to generations of Fox patrons, the organ was manufactured especially for the Fox by the M.P. Moller Company of Hagerstown, Md. Through the golden age of Hollywood, it reigned as one of the most colossal theater organs in America, equipped with 3,610 pipes, 376 stops and 42 ranks.

Seated before it, an organist was a magician who could elicit an entire

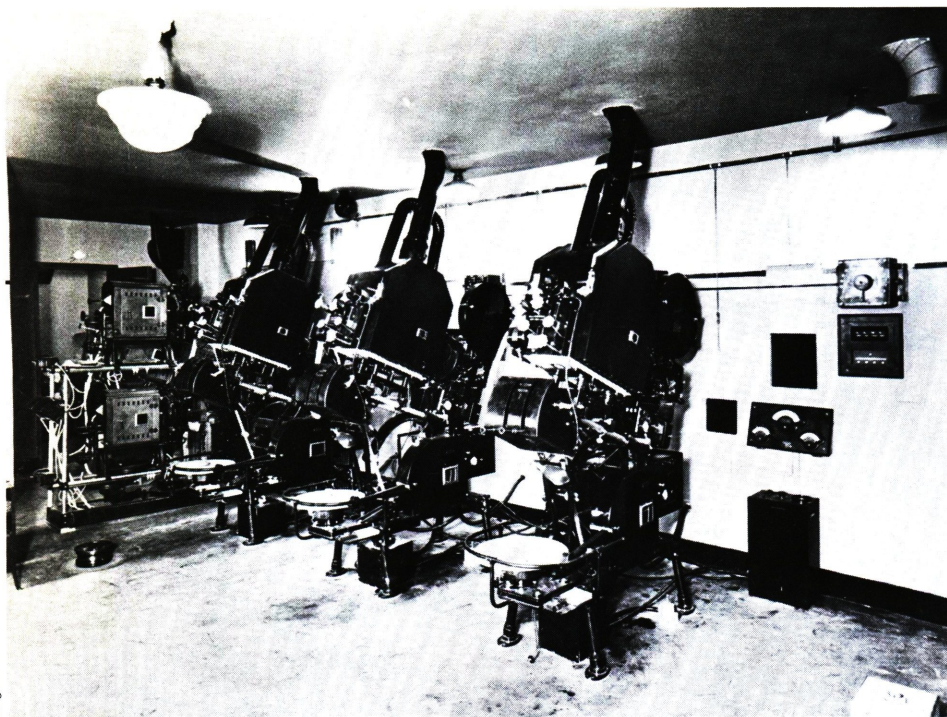
When the Fox opened Christmas Day, 1929, its face was all fantasy, but its technical equipment was top of the line — the latest available. Much of the original equipment, in fact, is in use today: stage elevators, some of the electrical board, the star- and cloud-makers, etc. A lot of it had to be coaxed back to life—the Moller organ, the sunrise-sunset effect, for example—but its durability is a tribute to the original engineers and designers.





Jonathan Hillyer/copyright Southern Accents

The "tenting" (facing page) above the upper levels is more than decorative. It is an acoustical foil which draws stage sounds to the rear of the house. The handsome trefoil arch above, one of two organ grilles, is one of the most spectacular visual elements of the main auditorium.



orchestra from his one colorful instrument. He could make exotic animal sounds and bird whistles; he could simulate an oboe, a flute, a clarinet, gongs, fire whistles, and more than two dozen percussion instruments. In the theater's heyday as a movie palace, the organ was the cherished prelude to the feature film. Bathed in spotlights, it rose from beneath the stage, booming out a happy medley of the day's popular songs, mixed with an assortment of light classics; but it had a serious side, as well, and anyone privileged to hear a Bach fugue on the Moller didn't soon forget it.

The organ was partially repaired during the managerial reign of J. Noble Arnold in the 1950s, and again by Joe Patten in 1963. An electrical engineer who sells X-ray equipment for an Atlanta area company, Patten was charged by the American Theater Organ Society with the task of restoring "Mighty Mo" to its original lustiness. The job required 10 full months, after which Patten maintained a regular maintenance program. Seven miles of cable were used in the rewiring.

A love for the Moller naturally led to an undying affection for the

theater itself; Patten was one of the charter trustees of Atlanta Landmarks, Inc., and serves the Fox as technical director.

Deep beneath the stage, the Fox resembles the hold of a cargo ship. Huge boilers, furnaces, pipes and ducts heat, air condition, ventilate and light the landbound vessel that sprawls over much of a city block. Keeping the premises ship-shape clean is made easier by a central vacuuming system, installed in 1929. Later, an emergency generator salvaged from the demolition of the St. Joseph's Infirmary in downtown Atlanta assures that, in event all else fails, emergency lights at the Fox will remain on.

The Fox was a refuge from reality in more ways than one. In 1929, even the most patrician families suffered the humid heat that blanketed Atlanta in mid-summer. Public buildings, offices, stores, and most other movie houses could offer no greater relief than ceiling fans or "air cooling." Yet, when it opened, the Fox was equipped with a central air conditioning system capable of turning the Arabian Nights auditorium into the Arctic, if its operators so desired. The original 500-ton York system was replaced by a Carrier

system in 1947, and has been improved periodically. It can cool the auditorium in only 10 minutes.

An original ventilating system pumps stale air from the auditorium through large ducts into the basement, where it is washed through a bank of fine sprays, then returned, fresh again, to the auditorium.

Elsewhere beneath the stage, a seven-story dressing room wing can accommodate 130 performers in 17 communal dressing rooms, and two others reserved for the private use of featured stars. Each has showers and other facilities. The area is serviced by an automatic passenger elevator.

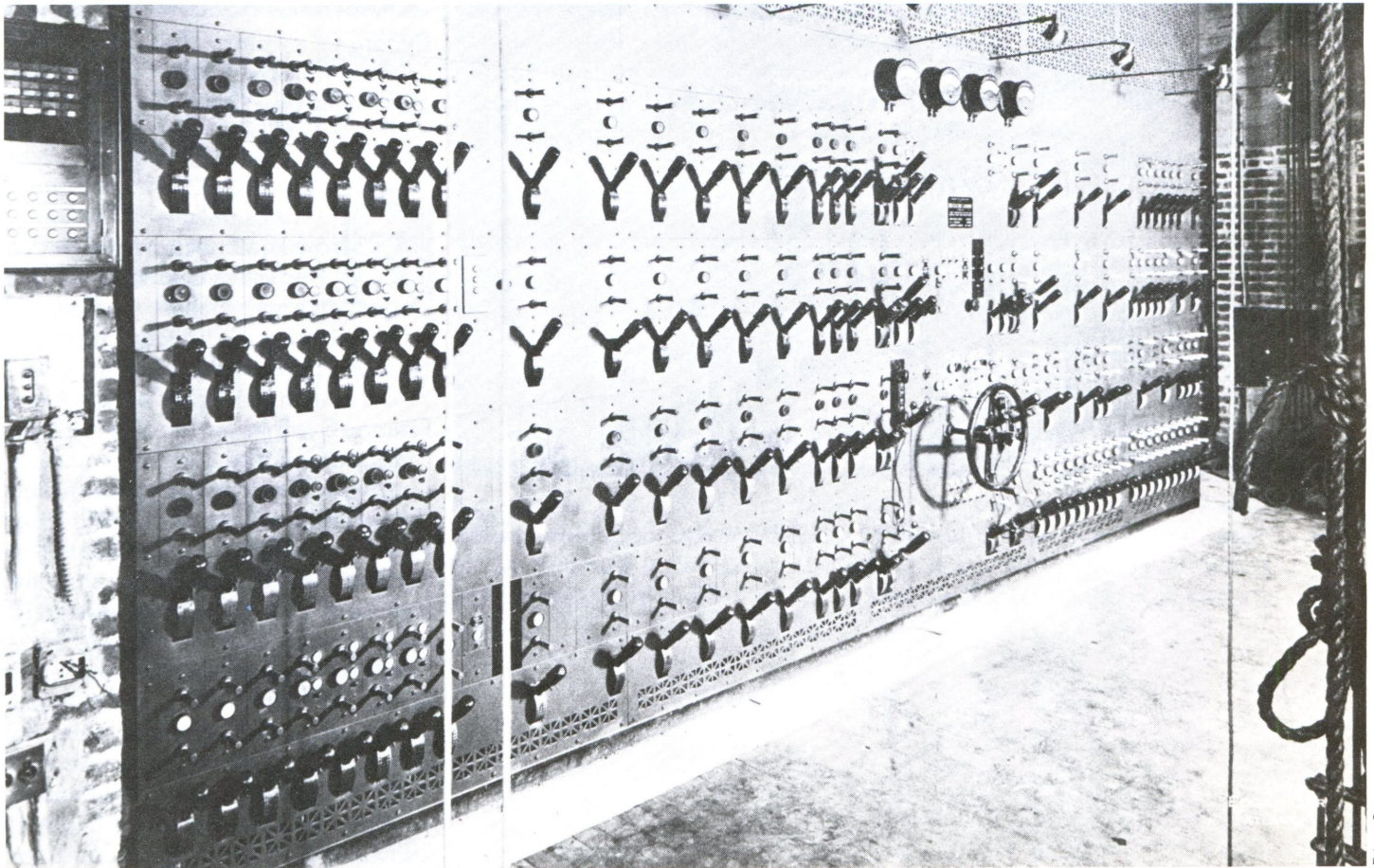
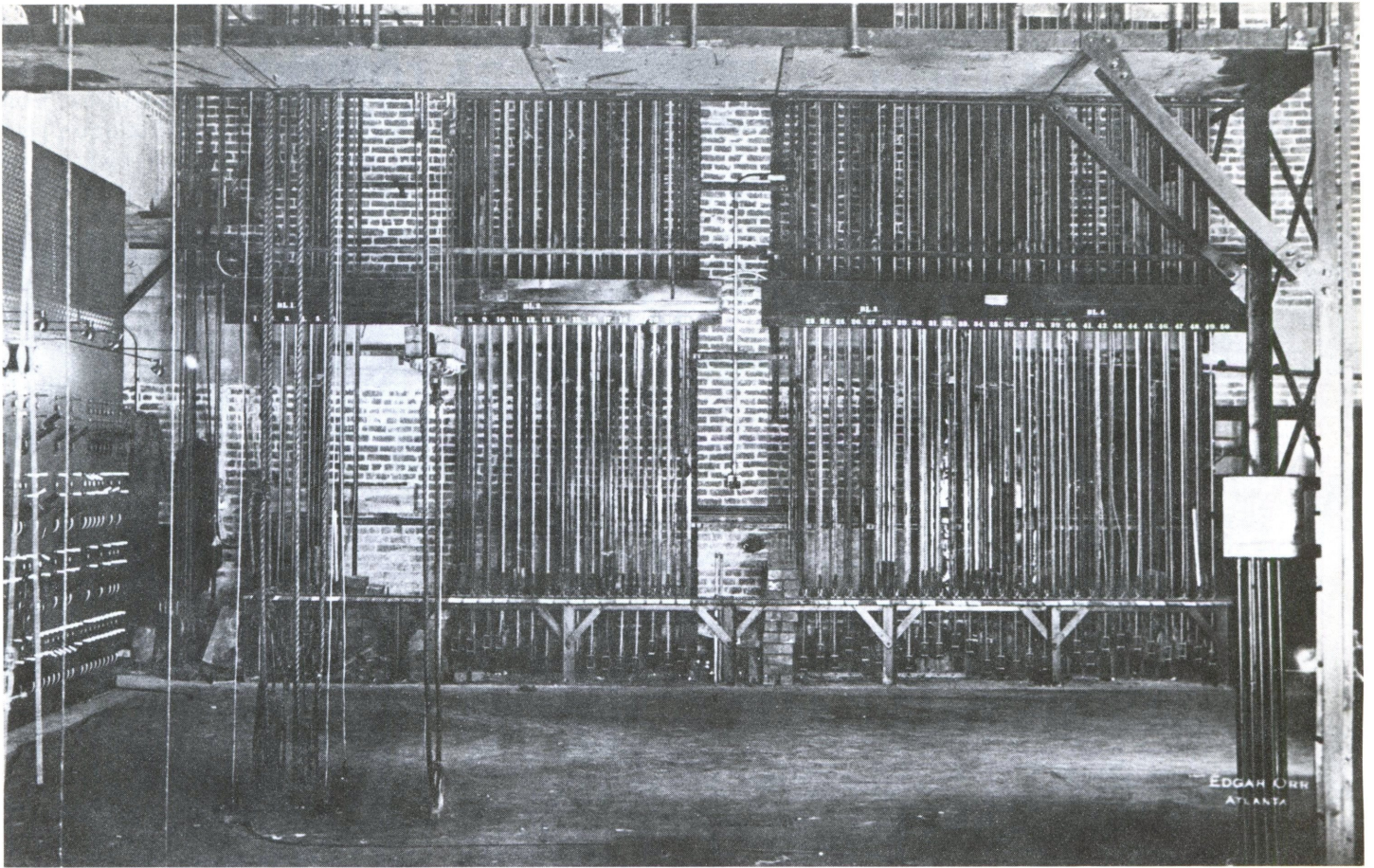
A six-story storage wing is served by a large freight elevator, and has direct access to the stage from its upper four floors. Offices and rooms reserved for maintaining and managing the huge facilities are also in this labyrinth of corridors and staircases.

In addition to technical equipment and decor inside the theater, attention also is being paid to the theater's public face on Peachtree Street. A \$200,000 fund provided by the City of Atlanta through a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Block Development Grant was used to restore the theater's long-neglected retail area at the Peachtree Street-Ponce de Leon Avenue corner.

All materials not part of the theater's 1929 facade were stripped away, and facades rebuilt according to original plans, complete with leaded glass, paneled glass doors, and awnings.

Fifty years after debuting to an awestruck public, the Fox is once again beginning to show her finery as one of the grandest ladies of Peachtree Street. F

Original equipment pictured on these pages was top of the line. Counterweighted arbors for scenery, electrical board at right have been improved, but are still in use. Projectors have been replaced.



VAUDEVILLE TO WIDE SCREEN, OPERA TO ROCK: VERSATILITY HAS BEEN A KEY TO SURVIVAL



Fox Theatre files

Circa 1933: "I'm No Angel" was described by critics as Mae West's "most free-wheeling" and "most satisfying" movie. Made just before blue-nosed production codes went into effect, it was considered risqué. This must have been Southeastern premiere, because it opened at the Paramount in New York. Her co-star: relative newcomer Cary Grant.



Tommy Thompson & Noel Davis/copyright 1976

Because it cuts them up, this familiar ticket box is known technically as a "chopper."

From the Fanchon and Marco "Sunkist Beauties" to the Atlanta Ballet Company's annual Christmas holiday presentation of Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" . . . from Enrico Leide and the Fox Grand Symphony to the Atlanta Symphony, the Moscow Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra and Count Basie Orchestra . . . from Rosa Ponselle and Lawrence Tibbett to Beverly Sills and Luciano Pavarotti . . . from Paderewski to Van Cliburn, Nelson Eddy to Elvis Presley . . . from early black-and-white "talkies" on a rectangular screen to panoramic spectacles in 26-speaker stereophonic sound.

For a full half century, beginning on a memorable Christmas Night in 1929, the Fox has reigned as Atlan-

ta's pre-eminent entertainment forum, a showcase for the world's most outstanding performers, and most popular films. Fifty years from now, when the Fox celebrates its 100th birthday, chances are excellent that the leading names of the day still will grace the huge stage.

Those who originally envisioned this Arabian Nights complex were confident it would stand, perhaps not literally until the end of time, as dedication speakers loftily proclaimed, but at least for many, many generations. It might not change physically, but entertainment policies would adapt to changing times. This ability to accommodate modern tastes, and retain its enigmatic dignity, has kept the Fox a vital part of Atlanta's personality and saved it from the wreckers' vengeance while, one by one, old rivals have disappeared.

Like all grandiose movie palaces of the "Golden Age", the Fox was intended as a total entertainment complex. Movies were augmented by live stage shows, featuring troupes of chorus girls, acrobats, organ and orchestra concerts. Only a truly memorable film could compete with all this. Such was not the case that opening night in 1929, when more than two hours of "preliminaries" finally led to the showing of *Salute*, a romantic little William Fox comedy with George O'Brien, Helen Chandler and the obsequious Stepin Fetchit.

Most opening nighters probably forgot the plot of the film before they were halfway home on the streetcar. But they undoubtedly retained happy memories of Iris Vining Wilkins' dexterity on the 3,610-pipe Moller organ, and the snappy kicks of the Fanchon and Marco "Sunkist Beauties."

Fox patrons had ample opportunity to catch the Fanchon and Marco productions. The troupe became a regular program item during the early years. So did Enrico Leide and the Fox Grand Orchestra. But nothing was as dear to the hearts of Depression-weary



Of the several "official" Fox organists over the years, none has been more closely identified with the Mighty Moller than Bob Van Camp, seen in top photo in a rare informal pose. The keyboard, immediately above, is a colorful artwork in its own right. It controls 3,610 pipes, 376 stops and 42 ranks.

Atlantans as the sound of the Mighty Moller organ booming out a medley of optimistic tunes as it ascended from its pit beneath the stage, and to "follow the bouncing ball" in sing-alongs.

As the Depression deepened, Atlantans came to rely on the Fox as a temporary sure-cure for their blues. The nearly 5,000 seats were regularly filled, with long waiting lines outside. Of course, the Fox itself had Depression blues, too. Maintaining such a costly operation in treacherous economic times required the staunchest faith and managerial ability. Miraculously, the theater closed for only brief periods in the early '30s, and in 1935 landed in the steady hands of Atlanta businessmen Arthur Lucas and William Jenkins.

Under the Lucas and Jenkins stewardship, the Fox booked the

top films, and a brilliant parade of live talent in special concerts. The line-up included violinists Fritz Kreisler and Yehudi Menuhin; operatic sopranos Grace Moore, Kirsten Flagstad and Rosa Ponselle; Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra; Paderewski and Sergei Rachmaninoff; opera's Lawrence Tibbett; Nelson Eddy, Dr. I.Q. and many others.

Even Franklin Delano Roosevelt was once a featured attraction. In May, 1932, Roosevelt, then governor of New York, gave the commencement address for Atlanta's Oglethorpe University and received an honorary degree. Vintage photos show FDR accepting his degree from the University's president, while Georgia's young governor, Richard B. Russell, looks on with a Mona Lisa smile.

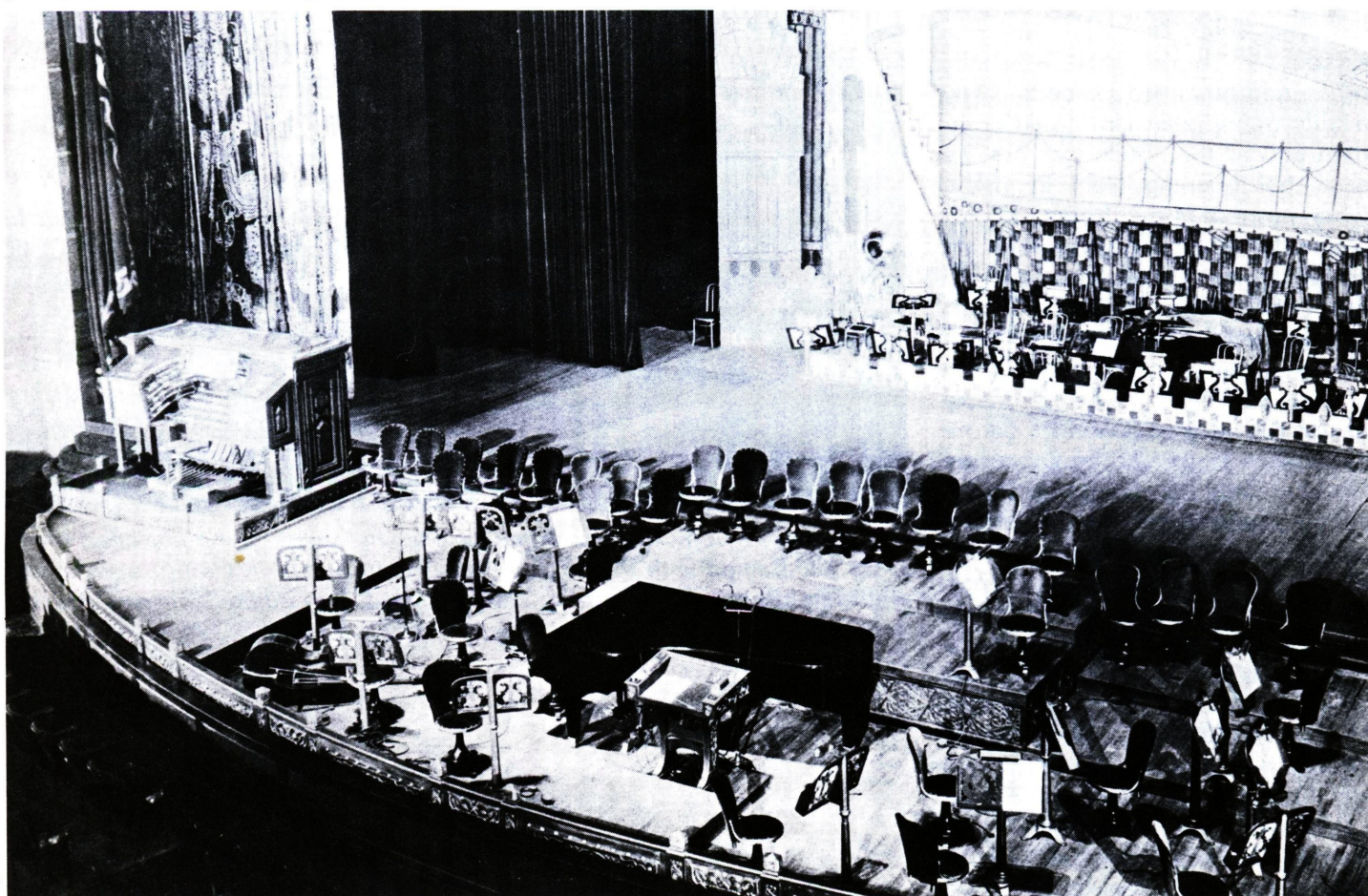
As the Depression blended into

the early 1940s war years, Atlantans escaped the world's madness through the genteel insanity of a Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers musical, and the reassuring warmth of Claudette Colbert and Greer Garson.

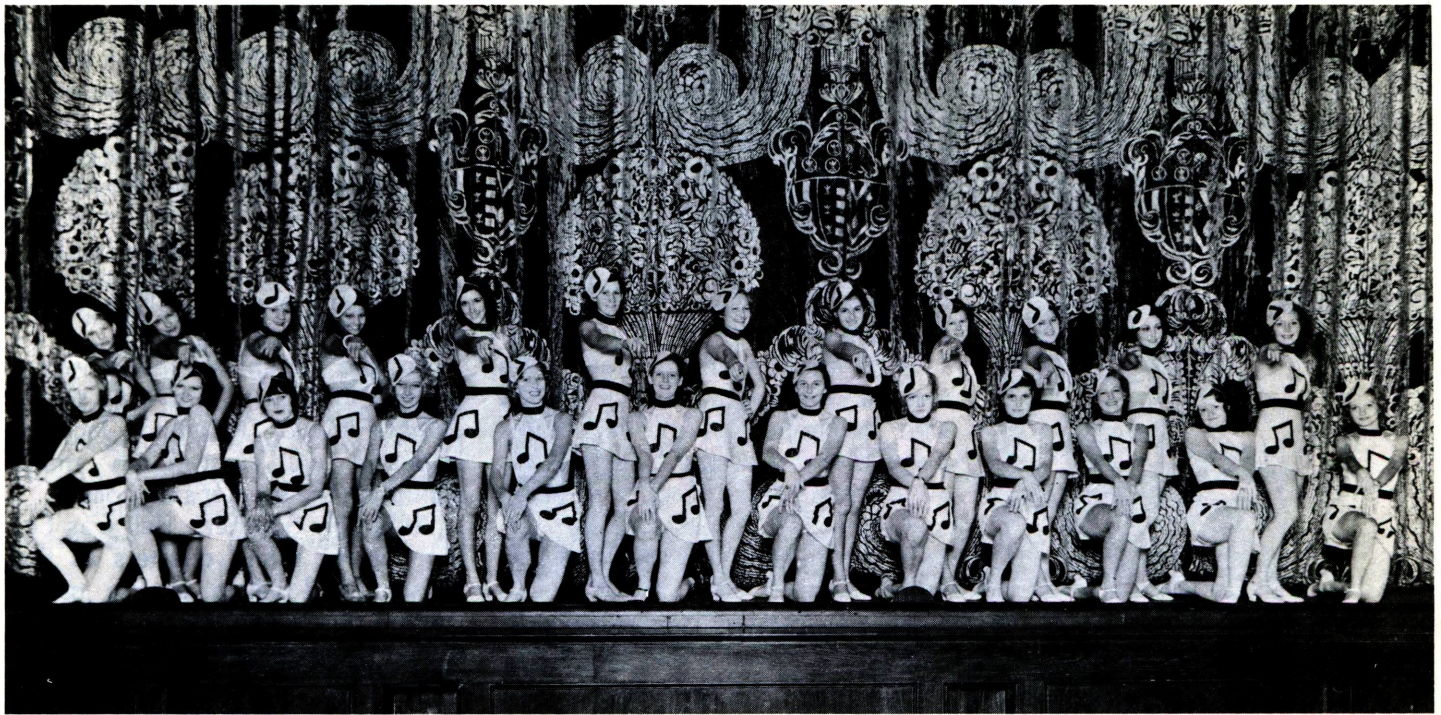
The theater was deprived of the host role for Atlanta's most brilliant celluloid moment. The much smaller Loew's Grand was chosen as the site of the 1939 *Gone With the Wind* premiere that attracted half of Hollywood and riveted world attention on Atlanta for nearly a week. The Loew's won the honor because GWTW was a Selznick International-MGM release, and Loew's, an MGM subsidiary, required that the premiere be at its major local outlet. The Fox had been part of the Loew's family for a brief time in the early '30s.

When old rivals like the now

"Grand" orchestra — i.e., of small symphonic size — was a regular feature of the Fox's stage shows in its early day. Massive elevators — still functional — lifted the musicians from a lower level. In this photo, the Moller organ and gold piano also are on stage.



Edgar Orr



Edgar Orr/Kile Studio

Records are lacking, but chances are these be-noted ladies are the Fanchon & Marco troupe who played regularly in the early days.

departed Loew's, Roxy, and Paramount began to suffer from television and drive-in movies in the early '50s, the Fox was fortunate to have as manager a shrewd businessman and ardent Foxophile named J. Noble Arnold. Arnold upheld the theater's proud traditions until his retirement in 1970. During his administration Arnold brought to his stage such name talent as comedian Jerry Lewis (with whom he had a bitter feud) and young sensation named Elvis Presley, who scandalized older Atlantans but knocked the young folks on their ears.

The Metropolitan Opera Company, which played the Fox through most of Arnold's managership, departed in 1968 for the greater number of seats in the then-new Civic Center—a decision regretted by most music lovers. The Met's annual spring visits were one of the most illustrious chapters in the Fox's 50-year history.

When Atlanta Landmarks, Inc. gained control of the theater in 1975, movies, a losing proposition for a number of years, were not reinstated except for special occasions like the summer Family Film

Festival. Live entertainment, such an integral part of the theater's entertainment package in the early years, was revived.

Atlantans flocked to see a variety of first-rate performers: rock groups, ballet, chamber and symphony orchestras, classical and jazz pianists, touring Broadway musicals and plays, concerts by Metropolitan Opera and country and western singers, and benefit performances by such distinguished artists as Arthur Fiedler conducting the Atlanta Symphony. More than 81 per cent capacity for all performances during one year proved to pessimists that the Fox was once more alive.

After the \$1.8 million mortgage held by five Atlanta banks was paid off in February 1978, bookings became even heavier. The Atlanta Ballet Company already had made the Fox its home for all Atlanta productions, including the annual "Nutcracker" presentations during the Christmas season. For the first time, Broadway shows could be booked for runs of several weeks. The smash hit, *A Chorus Line*, broke national records by grossing nearly \$1 million during a three-week run at

the Fox early in 1979; the musical completed a successful return visit later in the year.

Currently the house is booked some 250 nights a year, and management is working to reach 300 bookings in the near future.

Meanwhile, the refurbished Egyptian Ballroom and adjacent Grand Salon are being promoted as sites for convention functions, other large gatherings, and performances. Once Atlanta's largest and most popular dancing place, the Egyptian Ballroom has its own kitchen and stage; as a performance arena, it can seat over 800 guests.

The Fox scored an important coup in September 1978, when Alan McCracken was named manager. McCracken brought to the Fox an extensive background in the restoration and operation of vintage picture palaces elsewhere in the country. For four years he was executive director of the Pabst Theater in Milwaukee, and for five years executive director of the Ohio Theater in Columbus, Ohio.

Under his direction, the Fox is continuing its efforts to be one of the great showplaces of the world. **F**

Atlanta Landmarks had not only to raise a huge amount of money, but to prove to skeptics that Atlantans *really* wanted the Fox, not as a musty architectural curiosity, but as a living, breathing, viable entertainment center.

Moral support poured in from all over the country. *The Washington Post*, in an editorial, called the Fox, "a national landmark, a part of America's soul." The esteemed actress Helen Hayes called the theater "of inestimable value to the city of Atlanta, the state of Georgia, and the United States. It must be preserved for perpetuity at all costs."

Liberace, Jack Benny and scores of other celebrities also lent moral support and encouragement. Arthur Fiedler conducted the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in benefit performances.

What saved the theater, however, wasn't the moral support of non-Atlantans, but the "votes", in the form of attendance at Fox functions, and donations of large and small amounts of money, from thousands of Atlantans and Georgians.

Perhaps, cynics said, the young rock music crowd might be induced to attend concerts at the Fox. But older Atlantans—symphony supporters, Broadway musical buffs—would never, never, forsake their suburban neighborhoods for regular support of a theater in *that* neighborhood.

Oh, how far wrong those cynics turned out to be.

Sure, young pop and rock enthusiasts packed the house for Fleetwood Mac, Linda Ronstadt, Paul Simon and other musical idols. The young people, most of whom had previously seen the theater only from the outside, were mesmerized by the Oriental splendor of the old lady, enchanted by the perfect acoustics that conveyed the music even to the far reaches of the upper levels. They were recruited by the thousands for the fight to save her.

But the older generations lent



Tom Stowell/courtesy William Noll

Opera-lovers mourned the Metropolitan Opera's shift to the acoustically inferior Civic Center, and still hope for return of the prodigal. But opera has continued at the Fox. Above is a scene from Atlanta Lyric Opera's "Carmen" under the direction of William Noll, one of seven productions by that company. Lyric now is merged with Georgia Opera into the Atlanta Civic Opera Co., which also plans to perform at the Fox.

substance to the battle, and gave it credence. They came in droves, ostensibly to hear the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra, The Vienna Boy Choir, Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra, pianist Van Cliburn, Count Basie, and Bob Van Camp at the console of the Mighty Moller organ. They came for Cloris Leachman, for Kate Smith, for a Republican Party fund-raising gala that featured Elizabeth Taylor. They came to see the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and Hal Halbrook as Mark Twain.

In their heart of hearts, though, the older Atlantans also came to relive their youths, when *they* had been mesmerized by the wonders of the Fox, and an evening there was an evening to be treasured. They brought their children and their grandchildren.

In 1976, nearly 25,000 bought tickets to nine performances of "The Nutcracker," the Atlanta Ballet Company's traditional Christmas holiday present to the city. It was moved permanently from the

1,800-seat Symphony Hall after that phenomenally successful season. Subsequently, the Ballet moved all its local performances to the Fox. Like so many other varied productions, the ballet seemed to fit in naturally with the grandeur of the Fox.

Earlier, the firm of Hammer, Siler, George Associates reported in a detailed economic feasibility study that there was a pressing need in Atlanta for an entertainment facility like the Fox, and that the Fox could be operated at a profit. During its first full year under Atlanta Landmarks' management, the Fox averaged 81 per cent of capacity for its many attractions.

"Although the city of Atlanta does possess a wide variety of audience support facilities, there is a discernible void for a specific type of facility such as the Fox," the study concluded. "In effect, other existing facilities do not provide the combination of acoustical quality and stage arrangements required by several major promoters, combined with the



Mitch Deutsch/Ray Spurlin

Joe Patten led his own "Save the Moller" campaign years before the "Save the Fox" drive became necessary. In 1963, he spent 10 full months (and seven miles of rewiring cable) restoring the organ, and has maintained it since. An early trustee of Atlanta Landmarks Inc., he is now technical director of the Fox.

adequate seating capacity to ensure the economic success of the productions."

The study maintained that though the Atlanta Civic Center met most performance seating requirements, "There is almost total agreement among performers and patrons that the acoustics leave much to be desired." On the other hand, the report continued, Symphony Hall's superior acoustical qualities were mitigated by its limited seating.

The Fox made money from rentals, but to enhance profitability, a 25-cent "tax" that went directly to the Save-the-Fox fund was attached to each ticket sold. During 1976, the theater raised more than \$67,000 in 25-cent donations—proof, as theater management said at the time, "that the Fox can take care of itself."

Sunday afternoon tours of the theater's "secret places" attracted thousands, and added more resources to the preservation fund. Other monies were raised by the sale of T-shirts, souvenir books, record albums, concessions, and

Save-the-Fox bumper strips.

More encouraging were outright donations—the dollar bills, the \$5s and \$10s and modest checks—from individuals alarmed that this irreplaceable treasure, which many so recently had discovered, would be snatched away from them.

The Save-the-Fox campaign had been strictly grass roots in origin: architects, historic preservationists, organ buffs, movie lovers, nostalgic citizens. Only later did it attract the monied leadership needed to push its ambitious fund drive over the top.

Beauchamp Carr, as Board President of Landmarks, made the Fox a full-time career for the duration. Accounting executive Harold Stokes and attorney Joseph V. Myers contributed their respective expertise, and Arthur Montgomery provided valuable experience in public campaigns as well as valued entree to the business community. McCann-Erikson contributed advertising and graphics skills.

As deadline for the first mortgage payment approached, Atlanta

Newspapers executive Anne Cox Chambers, Josephine Robinson and Katie Riley underwrote a Van Cliburn benefit concert. The late Mrs. Frances Abreu donated Coca-Cola stock, and the Woodward Fund offered the first foundation support.

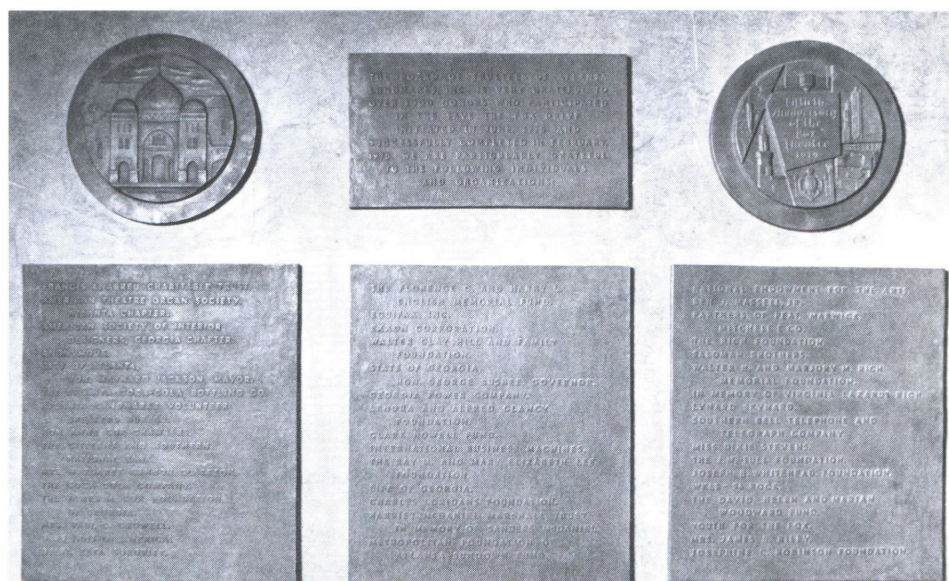
Then an anonymous donor (not Atlanta's most famous anonymous, Coca-Cola tycoon Robert W. Woodruff) pledged the final \$400,000 if Landmarks could raise the remaining money. Major portions came from the James M. Cox Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, Federal grants secured through the City and State, and more anonymous donors (including, perhaps, the famous one). But that first \$400,000 pledge made the dominoes start falling.

In all, some 7,000 individual contributions helped put the drive over the top. The Fox was saved six months ahead of schedule. When Gov. George Busbee presented Atlanta Landmarks officials with a \$100,000 state check, he called the Fox "one of our state's most important cultural resources, an architecturally significant structure that should be preserved for many future generations to enjoy."

Ted Stevens, then manager, had booked events more than a year ahead of the mortgage deadline. Dedicated volunteers continued to refurbish the Mighty Moller organ, the heating and air conditioning system, the lighting and complex stage equipment. They were resewing curtains, patching frayed carpeting, repairing furniture and making plans for another fundraising effort—to restore the theater to its original glory—even while the champagne was being poured and the tears were being shed at the press conference announcing the building's salvation.

Thanks to thousands of people who believed in the Fox, it survived to celebrate its 50th birthday, and will still be enthraling Atlantans when it's 100.





A plaque designed by Julian Harris and mounted in the arcade lists those who donated more than \$5,000 to "Save the Fox."

The 50th anniversary celebration of the Fox Theatre was launched with a month of special programs in December, 1979. These included a benefit concert by soprano Beverly Sills, a concert (his second at the Fox) by clarinetist Benny Goodman, the annual Parade of Carolers, a 50th Anniversary Party featuring a 750-pound cake, the annual Nutcracker performance of the Atlanta

Ballet (also celebrating its 50th anniversary), country-western singer Waylon Jennings, an architectural tour of the building, and the traditional New Year's Eve party. The plaque pictured above and the medallion on p. 30 also were part of the celebration. Tom Dean served as Chairman of the 50th Anniversary Committee.

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